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## **‘I mean, how boring would the world be without music? ’: Pupil voice and attitudes to music during the transition to secondary school**

### **Abstract**

Pupil voice research has been recognised in the last fifteen years for its potential to re-shape the conditions of learning and help raise child engagement and standards of achievement. In music education, however, there still seems to exist a misalignment between the content of the curriculum and pupils’ learning expectations and interests. The aim of this study was to explore pupils’ views about school music during the transition to secondary school and identify which components of their music lessons contribute to them feeling happier about music at school. The analysis of interview and questionnaire data revealed some pupils’ disillusionment about music at the beginning of secondary school when their initial high expectations about opportunities for practical musical involvement were not met.

### **Keywords**

Musical enjoyment, transition, pupil attitudes, pupil voice, musical involvement

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## Introduction

The aim of this project was two-fold. It aimed, firstly, to bring together schools in the North East of England to enable the sharing of ideas about how the primary-secondary transition in music can be improved and, secondly, to explore which components of pupils' school music lessons seem to contribute to them feeling happier about music at school by allowing their voices to be heard during the beginning of secondary school.

Pupil voice research has been recognised in the last fifteen years since the pioneering work of Jean Rudduck (1999) for its potential to establish a more collaborative style of learner-teacher relationship where the conditions of learning can be re-shaped, child engagement can be made more meaningful and standards of achievement can be raised (Flutter, 2010). Allowing pupils' voices to be heard can lead to a better alignment between the content of the curriculum and pupils' learning expectations and interests. Burnard and Björk (2010) highlighted, in particular, the benefits that can be gained if pupils are allowed to voice their experiences of musical learning and school life. Referring to Lamont and Maton's study (2008) which found that children's attitudes towards music decline to a larger extent than in other curriculum subjects as they start to perceive musical ability as a fixed entity that not everyone possesses, they argued that teachers can be more responsive to individual learners' needs, interests and aspirations by taking seriously what pupils have to say about their music in school.

Furthermore, the potential benefits that good quality music education can have on children may be compromised during an important part of their emotional, intellectual and social development if the transition to secondary school is not supported effectively. Relatively recent evidence (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 2003; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002) suggests that primary and secondary schools are now paying increased attention to making the transfer process as smooth and anxiety-free as possible in an attempt to ensure 'progression', a strengthened transition from KS2 to KS3 and 'curriculum continuity' so that pupils 'get to a flying start' as they move to the secondary school (DfES, 2004:5). Lucey and Reay (2000) argued, however, that pupils' anxiety can be useful as it is central to the development of effective coping strategies during the transition to secondary school but that pupils often report a real sense of excited anticipation about their new school and this should not be overlooked.

Indeed, Marshall and Hargreaves (2007) found that most pupils in their study experienced less anxiety about moving up to the secondary school and the various transfer events that were now common practice among primary and secondary schools resulted in pupils looking forward to the transfer with increased expectations about what secondary school music would offer. However, where specific expectations had not been met, many pupils that had previously been designated by the primary schools as 'training' (pupils who were currently involved in musical training outside class music lessons) or 'aspiring' (pupils who were not currently having training but expressed an interest in doing so) changed their positive attitudes to music to negative ones. The danger of positive attitudes declining or dipping after transfer to secondary school has been discussed by Galton (2002) in the case of science and, in particular, regarding the more able pupils. In their study of teachers' views of the primary-secondary transition in music education, Marshall and Hargreaves (2008) concluded that progress in many areas of transfer and transition has been limited. Their study indicated that, even though there is commonly a good level of liaison activity between primary and secondary schools, most of these activities tend to mean 'familiarisation' for both teachers and pupils through open days and joint events with little liaison in music. The focus tended to be on administration of instrumental lessons with limited records passed on regarding children's musical ability and no emphasis on curriculum continuity and progression. In subjects such as music and physical education (Capel, Swozdiak-Myers & Lawrence, 2004), much less attention has been given to addressing curriculum continuity and progression between the two phases in comparison to English and mathematics and, more recently, in science (Braund & Driver, 2005).

Furthermore, in line with the findings of Mills (1996), Lamont et al. (2003), and Comber and Galton (2002), most secondary music teachers felt obliged to 'start from scratch' to be able to deal with the wide range of ability levels and the varied musical experiences that pupils would have had in the different feeder primary schools (Marshall and Hargreaves, 2008). Marshall and Hargreaves (2007) have suggested, however, that the 'start from scratch' approach and lack of appropriate liaison do not necessarily have to mean a 'negative introduction to music at secondary school'. They argue that where and when teachers are prepared to start from scratch with interesting and highly musical activities which include all

pupils and provide appropriate challenge regardless of their prior musical experiences, they are able to transition well and to increase their interest in music.

Measor and Woods (1984) advocated substantial differences between the primary and secondary curricula. They argued that these not only match the expectations of pupils moving up to secondary school, but also that 'planned discontinuity' encourages intellectual and emotional growth in pupils. A 'start from scratch approach' can prevent there being too much similarity between primary and secondary school curricula and encourages pupils to develop. It appears that when handled correctly, 'starting from scratch' can actually be a positive and beneficial approach which promotes the necessary development required to achieve a successful transition while still acknowledging and including the uniqueness of each pupil and all their previous experiences.

Issues relating to transfer and transition in music have been identified in numerous Ofsted reports (1993, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2011). The 2009 report (par. 185) reported that it was very rare for primary and secondary schools to have developed effective partnerships. The same report also indicated that many music teachers and subject leaders were often isolated with limited opportunities for helpful continuing professional development and challenge. As a result, the quality of provision was often inconsistent and teachers lacked understanding about what musical progress meant in practice. It was suggested that better links need to be developed between schools to help pupils make more consistent progress (par. 198). The latest Ofsted report recognised that attempts were being made to improve the transition between primary and secondary schools and welcomed, in particular, the focus on transition being made by the Musical Bridges initiative funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation<sup>i</sup>.

## Method

The basis for this research design arose out of both formal and informal conversations that the investigator had with secondary school music teachers in the North East of England. These personal conversations revealed a sharp contrast between some schools that have strong mechanisms in place to support successfully the primary-secondary transition in music education and others that admit lack of success in this area.

### *Sample and Ethical Considerations*

All secondary music departments in the North East of England were invited to participate in the project explaining its aims and expected outcomes. Those schools that were interested to participate in the project were initially asked to indicate where in a scale from 1 to 5 they considered themselves to lie in terms of the relevant strategies and mechanisms they have in place to support pupils' transition to secondary school in music (1: having a range of strategies in place which support the transition very effectively and 5: having no strategies in place with no transition work in music taking place). The schools that perceived themselves to be in the highest and lowest ends of the scale (1 and 5 respectively) and that expressed an interest to take part in the research, were then contacted by telephone to ascertain the extent and quality of the transition work that took place. This conversation helped determine which three schools were employing the most and best strategies to support pupils' transition to secondary school in music and which three schools had no such strategies in place. This confirmation of the characteristics of the sample before final selection reduced the possibility of bias due to self-selection. Six project schools were selected to take part in the project, three 'good practice' schools (Schools 1, 2 and 3) and three 'need to improve' schools (Schools 4, 5 and 6).

From the early conversations, the three 'good practice' schools appeared to have comprehensive strategies in place and felt confident that they could support children's transition from the primary to secondary school effectively. The music teachers from Schools 1 and 2 were given sufficient time to visit the feeder primary schools regularly and teach some music lessons, often involving the primary children in music productions. There

were also good links with instrumental teachers which enabled consistent support for children who had already started learning a musical instrument. Teachers from School 3 identified three factors which they felt led to successful transition:

- A designated transition worker who supported Year 6 pupils before the transition to secondary school;
- Occasional funded musical projects that allowed pupils from the feeder schools to work with secondary age pupils on a joint musical performance;
- String orchestras with Year 5 and Year 6 pupils having weekly sessions at the secondary school.

The three 'need to improve' schools did not report having such mechanisms in place and expressed the desire to work towards improving children's transition in their school. They felt that, if they could support the transition better, the pupils would be more confident in music at the beginning of Year 7 and teachers would have a basis to build upon. As one teacher said, for example, 'I think it would raise attainment as well, if the basics were able to be taught in primary schools, such as using keyboards, reading music, beginning to compose. Then they would be starting not from scratch, which is what we start from when they come here, from scratch'.

These schools were selected to represent geographical and socio-economic diversity within the North East of England. Participants' anonymity has been preserved in the presentation of the findings. The study has adhered to all ethical obligations as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (1995) and approved by the Research Ethics and Data Protection Sub-Committee in Durham University's School of Education. Participants were asked for permission to record and they were informed about the intended use and purposes of the research. They were also assured that their participation was fully voluntary and that anonymity would be preserved.

### *Data Collection*

Phase I of the project took place between May 2011 and July 2012. Phase II took place between July 2012 and July 2013. All six schools took part in the first phase of the project

and only the three 'need to improve' (Schools 4, 5 and 6) schools took part in the second phase.

This paper reports on whether and how transition in music improved for the three project schools deemed to be less successful (Schools 4, 5 and 6). However, its main focus is on pupils' attitudes to music in Year 7 and will particularly explore which factors seem to increase their levels of satisfaction towards music at the beginning of secondary school. It will draw on data collected through focus-group interviews with Year 7 pupils from the six schools during the first phase of the project. In addition, findings from an attitudinal questionnaire that was administered to Year 7 pupils three times during this first phase will be reported.

### *Focus-group interviews*

Focus-group interviews with Year 7 pupils from the six schools in Phase I (data are not available for school 3 in June 2011) and the three schools in Phase II covering all abilities were carried out three times during the year: i) either in June when the pupils visited the secondary school before the beginning of Year 7 or in September of Year 7 if the pupils did not get the chance to visit the secondary school in the summer (Phase I/IIa), ii) in November of Year 7 (Phase I/IIb), and iii) at the end of Year 7 (Phase I/IIc). Measuring pupils' attitudes at these three times has been recommended by researchers who have studied the transfer process (see Galton, 2002). Overall, 67 focus-group interviews in Phase I and 30 focus-group interviews in Phase II with 4-5 pupils in each group were carried out (for a breakdown of the number of interviews that took place in each school during the three time points in Phases I and II, see Table 1). Each interview lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. The interviews took a semi-structured interviewing format where participants were asked a set of questions but they also had the flexibility to raise any issues that were relevant and important to them during the course of the interview. The main themes that were covered in each interview concerned pupils' enjoyment of music in their primary and secondary school, what musical activities they were involved in, whether they were looking forward to their music lessons, what their expectations about music were in each different interviewing stage and what they would change in music if they were given the chance.



About 50% of pupils took part in more than one interview during each of the two years. It was not deemed important for the purposes of the research to interview the same pupils three times because different pupils would help provide a more holistic perspective of their musical experiences in Year 7. The focus of this paper is on these musical opportunities that pupils in Year 7 are given in each school and how these might shape their attitudes towards music. A secondary outcome of this investigation is about how pupils' attitudes might have changed from the beginning to the end of Year 7.

*Please insert Table 1 somewhere here*

### *Attitudes to music questionnaire*

An attitudinal questionnaire which measured pupils' attitudes to music was completed three times by Year 7 pupils in each school. Findings from the first phase of the project are reported here (June 2011, November 2011 and July 2012). This questionnaire was adapted from the attitudes to English scale as developed and used by Pell (2009) in his work on the consequences of transfer for pupils' attitudes and attainment. The attitudes to music scale consisted of 15 items (see Table 4) which required a Likert-type response on a 1-5 scale (1: Strongly agree, 2: Agree a little, 3: Not sure, 4: Disagree a little, 5: Strongly disagree, with the maximum score being 75). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the attitudes to music scale was 0.85 which indicates a very acceptable level of reliability (see, for example, Cortina, 1993).

### *Data Analysis*

The phenomenographic approach to data analysis (Marton & Booth, 1997) was adopted to explore pupils' views on the factors that seem to increase or reduce their enjoyment of music in Year 7. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim prior to analysis in order to maintain closeness to the meaning of the data and preserve the participants' own words in line with Åkerlind (2005). Using the Atlas-ti software for qualitative analysis (Muhr, 1997), each individual transcript was firstly examined closely by coding the emergent phenomena in the data and was then compared with the remaining interviews in an attempt to find similarities and differences in pupils' attitudes towards music. After all

transcripts were coded, similar events and happenings were grouped under a common heading or classification. The concepts that seemed to apply to the same phenomenon were then grouped together. This categorising process led to the emergence of 'categories of description' (Marton, 1981) to represent analytically the number of different ways of experiencing musical activities in the project schools at the beginning of secondary school. This was a strongly iterative and comparative process in line with the phenomenographic analytic method (Åkerlind, 2005); data were continuously sorted and resorted, and constant comparisons between the data and the emerging categories of description took place. The final ten categories are presented in table 2 (in Appendix) with supporting quotes from individual interviews. After it was deemed that these categories gave an overall and consistent picture of these participants' perceptions and attitudes, a cross-school and cross-phase comparison was made. This comparison revealed some similarities between schools but mainly allowed differences to come to the fore which offered a possible explanation as to why some pupils felt happier than others in their school or phase of interview.

The structure of the 'outcome space' was then investigated by relating the categories of description to one another and presenting them in a structured set which allows the phenomenon under investigation to be viewed holistically (see Figure 1). According to Åkerlind (2005), 'the outcomes represent the full range of possible ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question, at this particular point in time, for the population represented by the sample group collectively' (p.323).

The categories presented in Table 2 will be discussed in the findings section. It should not necessarily be assumed that the list of categories is exhaustive (i.e., that no new categories would emerge from additional interviews). However, data collected from the last interviews did not reveal any new categories and the results provide the basis for a useful debate about particular issues relevant to pupils' attitudes to music at the beginning of secondary school.

As far as the attitudinal questionnaire is concerned, it was not possible to ensure that the same pupils completed the three questionnaires in Phase I. However, even though any differences found cannot be attributed to a change over time, the data can provide an overall perspective of Year 7 pupils' attitudes to music in different time periods.

Furthermore, pupils from the same six schools completed the questionnaire and it is expected that their musical experiences in each of these schools would have been consistent. The attitudinal questionnaire was analysed with a series of repeated measures Analysis of Variance tests to detect whether there was a significant difference somewhere among the three sets of scores followed by pair-wise comparisons to identify where any differences lie.

### *Transition activities and training day*

A training day took place in February 2012 where all the project schools and music teachers from four additional schools came together to share examples of good practice regarding the transition. Ideas that were shared allowed the 'need to improve' schools to reflect on strategies they would like to adopt, such as liaising with primary schools on a regular basis, developing joint singing projects for Year 6 and Year 7 pupils or offering support and training for primary school teachers by preparing useful resources and tutorial videos for them among others.

However, of the three 'need to improve' schools, only one implemented new transition activities the following academic year. Teachers in the other two schools felt restricted by lack of financial resources, insufficient staffing in music and lack of support from the senior management. After the first phase of the project, it was decided that School 4 would close down and a new Free School would open in the same area. The music department in School 4 was happy to continue taking part in the second phase of the project even though they recognised that resources and support from the senior management for music related activities would be limited.

The one secondary school that did more on transition (School 6) tried to reinforce links with the primary schools where one of the music teachers visited the primary schools more regularly to offer support to pupils and teachers. At the same time, they had a 'Play Day' in July 2012 and in July 2013 where Y5 and Y6 pupils (instrumentalists and non-instrumentalists) from each primary school visited the secondary school. Primary and secondary pupils practised together during the day supported by the music teachers and peripatetic teachers in the school and they then gave a performance at the end of the day.

which parents were invited to attend. Those pupils that participated in this transition event in school 6 reported in the interviews that they found it useful. As one particular pupil said, 'you remembered everything you had been asked on the day and could put it into the music lesson'. Pupils who did not have the opportunity to participate in any music-related transition events in the other schools, felt that their participation in such events would have prepared them better for the start of their music lessons in secondary school. The following quote is representative of a number of pupils' views who did not take part in any music lessons or events in their secondary school before the start of the school year in September:

*'I would have liked to have a music lesson before September. It would have been useful'*  
(Phase IIb, School 5).

## Findings

### *Pupil voice before the start of secondary school*

The pupils interviewed before the start of the year in their new school reported a variety of musical experiences and activities in primary school. They talked about having the chance to learn and play various instruments in the primary school, take part in choirs and school plays or sing in the classroom and in school assemblies. Others talked about involvement in various projects including playing steel pans, African drums, participating in a 'stomp' project, a 'Dracula rock show', a 'Bugsy Malone' show, 'Lion King in Year 5 and Annie in Year 6' and Christmas and Disney shows. Some also emphasised cross-curricular links between music and other subjects.

There were differences to the extent that musical involvement was encouraged and maintained in the different primary schools where pupils came from with some reporting much richer musical experiences than others. About half of the pupils interviewed (about 50 pupils in Phase I and 20 pupils in Phase II) were happy with their primary school musical experiences especially when they had a regular weekly music lesson and had the chance to be actively involved in singing or in using the available instruments. However, it was quite

common for at least one pupil in each focus group to report disengagement and boredom with music in primary school when: a) there was a lack of regular music lessons; b) there was a limited range of instruments available; c) the available instruments were not all used; d) when other subjects were perceived as being more important and took preponderance over music; e) when the teacher showed favouritism towards certain pupils. All of those pupils who expressed disappointment with their musical experiences in primary school perceived music as a valuable and enjoyable subject and would have liked to have had a richer musical life during their primary school years with more interesting, structured and regular music lessons.

### *Pupil voice in the first year of secondary school: what pupils enjoy most*

The analysis helped elicit ten themes that, when considered as a whole, were found to represent these pupils' attitudes to music during their first year in secondary school. Figure 1 presents these themes as they interact with one another to show the conditions under which pupils report the highest satisfaction with their music lessons in Year 7. The key emergent theme was pupils' desire to be actively involved musically by doing practical and interactive work as opposed to 'sitting and writing' and carrying out assessments which they felt was often the case with other subjects. Their desire to be musically involved was also exemplified in their comments as *performing, composing, singing, playing a variety of instruments, working in groups and forming bands*, and getting familiarised with *different types of music*. The *teacher* was perceived as being the key determinant of the nature of pupils' musical involvement as decisions on how and to what extent pupils would be musically involved in the lesson would lie with the teacher. Pupils also reported a desire to be somehow involved in this decision-making process where they would appreciate an element of *choice* regarding the content and nature of their musical involvement. However, just being musically involved is not enough by itself to draw a complete picture of these pupils' attitudes to music. The study findings show that between being musically involved and reporting full enjoyment of their music lessons lies the pupils' desire to learn and make good progress. In other words, just making music is not enough. The musical tasks need to be carefully planned so that adequate learning and progression are taking place. A cross-school and cross-phase comparison revealed differences in how these themes are

exemplified in different schools or in different phases within the same school and these are presented below. Reference is made to particular quotes from the interviews (Table 2 in Appendix) to illustrate these findings.

*Please insert Figure 1 somewhere here*

## **Practical work**

Pupils reported enjoyment of their music lessons when they were involved in practical work where they had the opportunity to exercise their musicality throughout the lesson by taking an active role in the lesson, making music or participating in various projects. This active practical work was contrasted in the pupils' comments with other school subjects which involve 'a lot of writing and study techniques' (e.g. quotation 1i, Table 2). Where pupils had the chance to be involved in this kind of practical work, they reported higher levels of satisfaction with school music (e.g. see quotations 1i, 1ii, 1iii, 1iv, 2i, 2ii, 4, 6ii, 8i, 10, 11i, 11ii, 14ii). In contrast, when writing and testing in music was perceived as dominating the music lesson over practical work, they reported enjoying music less (e.g. see quotations 7i, 7ii, 7iii).

## **Singing**

Interesting perspectives about singing in secondary school emerged. A small number of pupils (3 boys) disliked singing in class quoting reasons including singing not being a 'manly' activity and feeling embarrassed to sing in front of their friends in class. However, singing seemed to play a significant role in a number of pupils' lives (e.g. see quotations 18ii, 18iii, 18iv). About 50% of the pupils interviewed mentioned their desire to sing both in school and outside school (e.g. see quotations 19, 20i, 20ii, 22i, 22ii). Some expressed disappointment about singing opportunities in secondary school (e.g. see quotations 18i, 21) or about lack of singing compared to primary school where it formed, in some primary schools, a significant part of pupils' musical and social identity. This point is illustrated by pupils in school 3:

*'You start when you're in reception, because you learn the ABC song and you're singing that all the time and then you just gradually learn more songs.'*

*Singing was an important part of our lives.*

*Even in the playground our games would have something to do with singing.*

*It was just like you could go with the flow. It was a relaxing time.*

*It was and now we're all like 'homework'.*

*...It kind of joined us together, like the whole school. ...and we would all sing in groups, so it wasn't very embarrassing'. (Ic, school 3).*

## **Performing and Composing**

Part of pupils' overarching desire to be musically involved at the beginning of Year 7 was their participation in performing and composing activities. The analysis of the findings shows that these pupils were willing to perform a musical piece to others in class (example quotations 28, 29) or outside of the class (example quotations 26ii, 26iii) after a period of practice (example quotation 25). When well-organised opportunities to perform were available, pupils reported higher levels of satisfaction for their music lessons in the school. However, in School 4, for example, pupils seemed less satisfied with music during the second phase of the project (example quotation 27) possibly due to the school closing down the following year with negative repercussions to staff morale, enthusiasm and overall music provision.

Similarly, when composing activities were actively encouraged in the school, pupils talked with enthusiasm about the creativity, imagination and freedom that such music making activities can generate (example quotations: 31iii, 31v, 32ii, 33iii, 35ii, 35iii, 37ii). In particular, pupils talked highly about their involvement in a series of progressive composing activities that culminate in a larger musical product as was the case in school 6 despite the perceived challenges that this kind of 'project work' entailed:

*'We made a movie of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory – in groups, we put the music in the background.'* (35i)

*'We compose our own music – I love the freedom.'* (35ii)

*'Our project work is challenging but we can do it.'* (39i)

## **Playing a variety of instruments**

A key factor that seems to facilitate or constrain the extent to which pupils are satisfied with practical work is whether opportunities to play the available musical instruments are built in their music lessons in an organised and structured way. At the very start of secondary

school, all pupils interviewed expressed their excitement and enthusiasm about music in the new school mainly because of what they were seeing around them such as the bigger spaces, the variety of available instruments and the music technology resources. They all reported looking forward to making good use of these facilities. Subsequent interviews during Year 7 revealed pupils' increased satisfaction with music when they were given the chance to make good use of the available instruments. Three patterns of instrument use were observed which led to differential levels of satisfaction.

Firstly, when pupils had the chance to only play the keyboard during Year 7, they reported the least satisfaction, especially when keyboard work was limited (example quotations (46i, 46ii, 46iii, 46iv, 46v, 48ii, 50i, 51iv, 52iii, 52iv). Secondly, pupils from schools 2 and 4 in particular, enjoyed the keyboard work they did in the classroom but expressed disappointment about not using other available instruments, such as drums and guitar (example quotations for School 4: 47, 59i, 62i, 62ii, 62iii, 62iv). In school 2, pupils were disappointed with only being allowed on the drums 'as a treat for completing the work' (51i) after the main keyboard work (51ii) or because some instruments that are available are not used (51iii). However, when there is a variety of musical instruments available and pupils can make good use of these in the classroom, there is a heightened sense of satisfaction and achievement among the pupils that were interviewed (example quotations 49i, 49ii, 54, 55i, 55ii, 55iii, 57i, 57ii, 57iii, 60ii, 61i, 61ii, 61iii, 61iv, 64i, 64ii, 64iii).

### **Group work, different types of music and choice**

In addition to making good use of a variety of instruments, pupils talked about their desire to be engaged in group work by forming bands preferably in friendship groups, and communicating musically with one another. When this was actively encouraged, pupils reported higher satisfaction with school music (example quotations 70i, 72ii, 72iv, 72v, 77, 78i). Furthermore, a desire was expressed among the pupils interviewed for more 'modern' and 'up-to-date' songs to form part of their school music curriculum (example quotations 81, 83i, 83ii, 84, 85, 88). Last but not least, pupils talked of their desire to be given an element of choice regarding aspects of their musical involvement as far as choice of instruments or types of music are concerned. In school 6, for instance, pupils were excited



about a perceived element of choice that they felt was available to them (example quotations 92, 93i, 93ii).

### **Perceived Learning and Progression**

Pupils also talked about a sense of learning and progression that needed to be tightly linked to their musical involvement. It was not just the fun aspect of their music lessons that they were keen to experience, but also the feeling of making good progress in learning. Comments about learning and progression were made by a number of pupils especially during the first interviewing phase. There was a perceived need for appropriately differentiated tasks (example quotations 103, 105), for making good progress in music inside and outside of the classroom (example quotations 100, 101ii, 102iii, 106i, 106ii, 107i, 107ii, 112i, 112ii, 111ii) and ‘spending more time’ in order to go into more depth ‘on more important modules’ (example quotations 108i, 108ii, 109).

### **Teachers**

The analysis of the data revealed the important role of the teacher in determining the extent to which pupils reported higher or lower levels of satisfaction with school music. Pupils appreciated their ‘great, proper teachers’ that make the lesson ‘fun’, are ‘relaxed’, offer clear guidance and appropriate support. When pupils perceived their teachers as having the aforementioned characteristics, they were happier with their music lessons (example quotations 113i, 113ii, 115i, 115ii, 116, 118, 119i, 119ii, 119iii, 126i, 126ii, 126iii, 126iv). However, pupil comments showed that when there was insufficient guidance, lack of clarity in instructions and low levels of support in practical work, pupils reported lower levels of satisfaction (example quotations 122, 123i, 123ii, 124i, 124ii, 125).

### ***Questionnaire findings on attitudes to music***

A series of repeated measures Analysis of Variance tests revealed some statistically significant differences in pupils’ attitudes to music from the end of Year 6 (time 1) to the end of Year 7 (time 3). When all schools are considered together, there was a significant difference in pupil attitudes from time 2 (November of Year 7) to time 3 (see Table 3). For schools 3, 5 and 6 there were non-significant differences among the three time periods.

Even though pupil attitudes generally presented a falling pattern, in school 5 pupil attitudes were higher between times 1 and 3. Statistically significant differences occurred between time 1 and time 2 (for schools 1 and 4), between time 2 and time 3 (for school 4) and between time 1 and time 3 (for school 2).

*Please insert Table 3 somewhere here*

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for each of the questionnaire items on pupils' attitudes to music. Items that refer to pupils' liking for practical work in music have mean values that are among the highest overall. In particular, the questionnaire findings in time 1 show that almost 60% of pupils strongly agreed or agreed that they like making music with their friends in class and they like making their own music. More than half (52%) strongly agreed or agreed that they like playing the music that other people have written and more than 70% like to listen to music that other people have written. The mean values for these four questionnaire items are not statistically different among the three time periods and some are higher from time 1 to time 2 or from time 1 to time 3. Similarly, almost 70% of pupils in time 2 felt that they were finding out new things all the time in music lessons and the mean value for this item was statistically higher than the equivalent mean value in time 1.

*Please insert Table 4 somewhere here*

However, it was observed that certain mean values were lower in times 2 and 3 compared to time 1. These were explored further and are presented in table 5. From time 1 to time 3, there was a statistically significant difference in pupils' responses in questionnaire items 1 (I like music more than any other school subject), 9 (Music is a good subject for everybody to learn), 10 (I always look forward to music lessons) and 13 (I seem to get tired easily in music lessons). Pupils in time 3 were more negative in their responses to these statements at the end of Year 7 in comparison to pupils' responses at the end of Year 6. Furthermore, there were statistically significant differences in attitudes towards singing in the classroom from time 1 and time 3 with pupils in time 3 reporting more negative attitudes.

*Please insert Table 5 somewhere here*

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The exploration of pupils' thoughts and feelings about music at the start of secondary school led to the emergence of ten themes which helped depict these pupils' perceptions about the value they attribute to their musical school experiences. At the end of primary school, all pupils expressed enthusiasm and positive anticipation about music in their new school regardless of the quality and breadth of their musical life in primary school. Pupils from the three 'good practice' schools had the opportunity to get a flavour of music in the new school during transition events that were organised in the summer of Year 6. Pupils from the three 'need to improve' schools did not participate in any musical activities during that time in the new school apart from school 6 which organised a 'Play Day' at the beginning of the second phase of the project with the participation of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils from the feeder primary schools. This musical event was perceived as being useful by the pupils who took part and the vast majority of the pupils interviewed would have liked to have experienced some kind of musical involvement during these summer transition events.

Nevertheless, all pupils were impressed with the bigger spaces that the music department occupied in their new school and they anticipated that this together with the impressive array of available instruments and the subject specialism of their prospective music teachers, would result in them experiencing very interesting and engaging music lessons. This enthusiasm from pupils permeated all interviews at the beginning of both phases. Subsequent interviews explored the nature of pupils' musical involvement and revealed a number of defining components of their musical experience that, when present, seem to make their music lessons more satisfying and enjoyable. Firstly, pupils were eager to be actively involved in practical work in the classroom where performing, composing, singing, playing a variety of instruments, making music in groups and getting familiarised with different types of music were perceived as essential elements. Secondly, an element of choice regarding the content and nature of pupils' musical involvement was perceived as being important. Last but not least, the teacher was considered to be the key determinant of pupils' musical experiences who would also set the musical tasks to the right level for all pupils to make appropriate progress.

A further cross-phase and cross-school comparison revealed similarities but also some differences between schools in terms of the extent to which pupils felt that their musical needs were satisfactorily met. Even though it was not the purpose of the study to determine which schools teach music better, some instances of pupils' experiences can help exemplify further the context in which the pupils reported higher or lower satisfaction regarding their music lessons in secondary school. Pupils in schools 1 and 3, for example, expressed the desire to sing more and pupils in schools 2 and 3 would have enjoyed using the available instruments more effectively within the classroom. A range of performing and extra-curricular musical opportunities were appreciated in schools 1 and 4 and all pupils expressed enthusiasm about having the chance to make up their own music in school. Pupils in school 5 were disappointed with their new teacher who was not perceived as being so enthusiastic and offering as many opportunities for musical involvement as their previous one.

Pupils in school 6, however, reported the highest satisfaction about music in their school in comparison to the rest of the pupils interviewed. It was interesting that all of the elements that have been found in this study to lead to pupils' enhanced satisfaction in music, have been reported as forming part of pupils' everyday musical experiences in school 6. Pupils in this school felt that there were ample opportunities for singing, composing, playing a range of instruments, practising and performing in groups, and making good progress in a supportive and appropriately differentiated way where an element of choice was encouraged by the teacher. Some background information will shed light on the perceived success of this school regarding its musical provision.

School 6 is a Musical Futures (MF) champion school whose pedagogical approach is based on the premise that pupils learn best and enjoy music more when informal out-of-school musical experiences are adapted and effectively used in the music classroom (Green, 2008; D'Amore, 2009). A case study investigation of seven MF champion schools identified a range of positive outcomes for pupils. Among these were pupils' increased motivation in music, their improved ability to identify areas of progress and development and a belief that the ability to be musical was something that can be developed rather than being based on innate talent. Studies by Gower (2012), Wright (2008) and Cabedo-Mas & Díaz-Gómez (2013) offered support for the use of such informal pedagogical principles in the music classroom but Gower also highlighted some of the barriers that schools might face in taking on such initiatives because of the increasing pressure for schools to meet rigid targets in a climate of league tables and school accountability.

This study further supports the fundamental principles of MF which are based on the underlying principle that pupils learn best and are more engaged in music when informal learning approaches are introduced into the more formal context of schools (Green, 2008). The findings of this study, such as pupils' desire to extend their repertoire to more familiar and popular types of music, to make music with their friends in groups, to be able to exercise an element of choice in their music making, to be able to use the available instruments effectively to perform and compose music in a comfortable and supportive environment are well-aligned with some of these MF principles. The present study thus confirms the importance of these aspects of provision in musical learning in the lower secondary school.

Listening to these pupils' voice helped to illuminate their views on the elements that make their musical involvement in school at the beginning of Year 7 enjoyable and satisfying. Overall, very positive experiences were heard as pupils shared some of these musical experiences. However, it is worrying that negative perceptions of music were also heard, especially when the same pupils were very enthusiastic and excited about music at the end of primary school. Even though there were certain limitations with the attitudinal questionnaire reported as it was not possible to ensure that the same pupils completed the three questionnaires in Phase I, the findings indicate a difference in pupils' attitudes from the beginning to the end of Year 7. Some pupils like music less, they find music more boring and they do not look as much forward to music lessons as they previously did. These considerations lead to the hypothesis that some pupils feel disillusioned and can become more disengaged with music at the end of their first year in secondary school. This hypothesis needs to be further explored in a systematic way. If it is found that pupils' attitudes drop as they start secondary school, this can have important implications for their subsequent musical development, their interest in music as a school subject and their lifelong engagement with music. Lamont and Maton (2008), for instance, attempted to explain the low uptake of music at GCSE level and found that the longer pupils are at school, the more likely are they to view music as being of less significance compared to other school subjects and as an 'elite code where achievement depends upon both possessing specialist knowledge and being the right kind of knower' (p.267). Temmerman (1993) highlighted the lasting influence of school music experiences on people's lives and the importance for teachers to engage pupils in practical music activities in order for school music experiences to be perceived in favourable terms. The role of the music teacher as a key figure in the teaching and learning process has also been emphasized by Cabedo-Mas and Díaz-Gómez (2013) who

argued that participatory musical activity can help pupils experience improved interpersonal and social relationships.

The importance of the music teacher in supporting pupils' active musical involvement giving clear guidance and an element of choice to the pupils has been highlighted in this study. Increasing opportunities for input, choice and decision making have been identified in the literature as enhancing an individual's perceived autonomy which, together with relatedness, can provide the most likely route to the enhancement of a student's quality of life during the transition to secondary school (Gillison, Standage & Skevington, 2008). Music as a subject is in a privileged position to enhance pupils' sense of relatedness through carefully planned groupwork and encourage autonomous work where pupils can develop their sense of agency and independence. In this sense and when taught effectively, music in the secondary school could equip pupils with appropriate strategies that could help them cope better with the academic and social changes that accompany the transition process (Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson & Pope, 2007).

At the end of the project, the music teachers and senior management in school 6 were keen to continue improving and developing further their successful 'Play Day' hoping to involve all Year 6 pupils the following year. In addition, they plan to introduce a particular song as a special transition song which all Year 6 pupils will be taught during the summer term with guidance given to the primary schools by the secondary school. This song will then be performed to the rest of the year group at the start of the new academic year after Year 6 pupils get a chance to learn to play the song using a new instrument. Music teachers in School 5 are keen to develop their transition work with primary schools as they feel that it would ease considerably pupils' transition to secondary school and it would help them make a stronger start. Some of their plans include working with the primary pupils on project-based learning activities, encouraging their GCSE pupils to teach Year 6 pupils as part of their Silver Artsmark Award and inviting Year 6 pupils to attend music performances in the secondary school. However, they feel restrained due to lack of time, financial resources, senior management support and the big number of feeder primary schools that they are working with.

Although this is a small scale study in terms of sample size, the quality and richness of the qualitative data adds an important perspective, building on and supporting previously published research. This study would not inform policy in its own right but because it adds to the existing literature, a comprehensive and compelling picture is building up. The schools that took part in this study were all keen to develop strong supportive mechanisms to try and

improve pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in music. Many music teachers felt dissatisfied with the lack of attention that is given to music during transition. Year 7 pupils felt that effective transition work in music could help them feel better prepared about music at the start of secondary school. Indeed, pupils' successful transition can enhance their interest to music as a subject and also help bring 'the largely imagined world of the secondary school into the 'known' experience of the Year 6 child' (Lucey & Reay, 2000). Here, the notion of relatability (see Bassey, 2001) is of relevance for teachers. While they may find that their circumstances vary from those described in this study, they are likely to find parallels with their situation. To that extent, they can relate these findings to their own experiences and take on board the suggestion to improve their provision for the Year 6 to 7 transition.

Furthermore, this research suggests that the work that takes place in music in Year 7 is crucial in engaging pupils in music at the beginning of secondary school. This finding supports Marshall and Hargreaves' (2008) conclusion that pupils can engage effectively and with developed interest with music as a subject when teachers at the start of secondary school include all pupils regardless of instrumental ability and are prepared to develop interesting and highly musical activities that can adequately challenge all pupils. A failure to do so may have detrimental consequences for pupils' musical development and interest for music during secondary school and beyond.

**Word count: 8,344**

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*Please insert Table 2 as an Appendix somewhere here*

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<sup>i</sup> *Musical Bridges: Transforming Transition* is an initiative funded by the Paul Hamlyn foundation. It aims to provide a continuous and progressive musical experience for 9-13 year olds that supports their personal, social and educational development. Available at <http://www.musicalbridges.org.uk/resources/> (last accessed on 27/03/2014).